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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000977

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FOR NEA/ARP:AMACDONALD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: UNITY, BUT NOT THIS UNITY

REF: A. SANAA 951
[1](#)B. SANAA 950
[1](#)C. SANAA 942

Classified By: DCM Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) Against the backdrop of growing secessionist sentiment in Yemen's south, some among those who support unity are voicing their frustration over centralization of power, lack of development and the weakening of the Saleh regime. The ROYG is focusing a lot of energy on secessionist feeling, but if it really wants to move forward, it must listen to the increasing calls for reform from across the political community. End Summary.

Bring Back the pre-'94 Unity

[1](#)2. (C) Unrest in Yemen's southern governorates is magnifying and being magnified by broader discontent with the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Even among those who reject the idea of southern independence there are significant and influential voices calling for retooling how the ROYG runs Yemen. In a May 20 "National Consolation" conference hosted by the opposition Joint Meeting Parties and attended by POL/E Chief, businessman, key opposition Islah party member and scion of the Yemen's largest tribal confederation Hamid al-Ahmar said, "we are with unity but we need a different kind of unity. I would like there to be a unity that includes Attas, al-Baid, and Ali Nasr Mohammed (referring to prominent southern leaders now living outside the country)."

Former Interior Minister MG (retired) Hussein Mohammad Arab told POL/E Chief on May 18 that many people in Yemen's south do not seek to secede, "but they can not accept the status quo." In the May 20 conference, former opposition presidential candidate Faisal Ben Shamlan said that the Yemeni people seek a return to unity as it was before the 1994 civil war. Ahmar's and Shamlan's comments particularly emphasize the feeling among some embassy contacts that the Saleh regime has concentrated more and more power into its own hands since the civil war.

[1](#)3. (C) Arab, a native of the southern governorate of Abyan, told POL/E Chief that addressing southern discontent would require the central government to "undergo significant reform or decentralize control." The regime appears to recognize this sentiment. Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and Security Rashad al-Alimi announced on May 19 a plan by which the ROYG would undertake to meet with local leadership in each governorate in order to prepare an individualized plan for devolving power in that governorate to a lower level.

[1](#)4. (C) Another common complaint is the dearth of development funding in various areas of the country. In a May 9 meeting

human rights activists from across the south complained to POLOFF that the ROYG failed to provide basic services like health care, adequate hospitals and schools. Sana'a University Professor Mohamed al-Dhaheiri recently told POLOFF, "Sa'ada, the south, tribal issues are all the same, (it's about) the lack of hospitals, schools and facilities. People want development." To roars of approval, Ahmar told the crowd at the May 20 conference that he had been invited by President Saleh to attend the May 21 Unity Day parade (the largest military parade in Yemen in recent memory) but said he would prefer to attend a "development parade." Hundreds of people in the governorate of Aden protested water and electricity cuts on May 20. This is another area in which the ROYG appears to be on the offensive. As reported in reftels, in recent days ROYG officials have promised development projects worth billions of Yemeni rials in southern governorates.

15. (C) A third common source of frustration among pro-unity ROYG critics is a prevailing feeling that the Saleh regime has weakened significantly. Assistant Secretary General Dr. Mohammed al-Sadi of the opposition Islah party told POL/E Chief on May 19, "the central government is weak...weaker than it has been for some time." Dr. Mohamed Mutawakil, Chairman of the opposition Union of Popular Forces, told POLOFF in April that the current regime is not capable of dealing with the multiple issues facing Yemen today and that things are much worse than they seem. Sheikh Mufarrah al-Buheibah, Paramount Sheikh of the Murad tribe in the governorate of Marib east of Sana'a, told POL/E Chief on May 18 that the Saleh government is in a "hopeless condition" and not capable of government reform sufficient to save the regime.

Frustration and Anger

16. (C) Regardless of the question of unity, frustration and anger are very real for many in Yemen. Abdulhakim al-Eryani, Director of the Foreign Minister's Office, told POL/E Chief on May 19 that the mood he senses in the streets is worse than he can remember for some time. Buheibah told POL/E Chief that Yemen's south is currently "open for others to march on," including foreign and internal radical elements. Arab said that many in the south, including many young men, are full of "frustration and anger" and while they do not particularly want secession, "they will follow anyone" who will help them lash out at the government.

Comment

17. (C) While southern secessionists have grabbed recent headlines in Yemen, the ROYG needs to acknowledge that secessionists are not the only unhappy Yemenis. For too long the ROYG has concentrated solely on putting out the brushfire of the moment. If it really wants to move forward, the ROYG must heed increasing calls for real reform from across the country's political spectrum. End Comment.
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